

REFLECTIONS ON THE RINGING WORKSHOP – held at Langebaan Village, 11 September 1993

Aldo Berruti

'No pain, much gain'

The Ringing Workshop was held under the auspices of the SAFRING Steering Committee, fully supported by the Southern African Ornithological Society (SAOS). The 32 participants included several international visitors, including Pertti Saurola (Chairman of EURING), Fernando Spina (Organiser of the Italian Ringing Scheme), and Ian Rowley from Australia, who was invited to submit an independent assessment of ringing in southern Africa, from a Southern Hemisphere perspective. Even more important, there was a cross-section of southern African ringers, amateur and professional, and representatives from the local nature conservation authorities.

The workshop was intended to review the objectives of ringing in southern Africa, and to establish written positions on a ringing policy, and ethics and standards for ringers, for the SAOS. The independence of the individual ringer was accepted at the outset. The workshop did intend, however, to provide a broader framework within which the ringer could customise his or her own effort more effectively. The workshop was intended to underpin the basis for ringing and to re-evaluate ringing in southern Africa. It was not a practical 'hands-on' session, neither did it intend to deal with administration, although significant results of the workshop related directly to these aspects of ringing.

During the morning, draft statements on policy, ethics and standards were thoroughly rehashed, and are now in the

process of revision before being submitted to the SAOS Council for adoption. In the afternoon, the workshop discussed a draft review of the results and objectives of ringing in southern Africa. Revised documents will, of course, be published at a later date.

I believe that there were four significant results. Firstly, the SAOS now has, or will have, clearly defined positions on policy, ethics and standards as they apply to ringing, which will apply to its members, who make up the majority of ringers in the region. Apart from the clarity given to ringers themselves, these statements are reference documents which provide a uniform set of guidelines for newcomers, and can be the basis for answering queries which originate outside the SAOS.

A novel innovation was a strong recommendation from the ringers that SAFRING issue its own authorisation, which would specifically allow ringers to use SAFRING equipment and rings. This authorisation would be separate to the permits issued by the provincial (or equivalent) nature conservation departments. Before receiving authorisation, a new ringer would have to meet certain qualifications, which have still to be defined and which would make due allowance for the practical regional difficulties in meeting training standards. Hopefully, a ringer with a SAFRING authorisation would be recognised as competent by the provincial bodies, making issue of ringing permits easier when ringers change areas. The process would guarantee a greater degree of uniformity in standards given the current fragmentation of authority in issuing of permits. It is not intended as another piece of bureaucracy, as it might appear at first glance, but as means of facilitating an improved quality control of ringing. This recommendation will

be put to the SAFRING Steering Committee.

A third important result was a strongly-supported proposal to run an annual ringers' workshop at a suitable locality. This would be a 'hands-on' exercise during which ringers can swap ideas on techniques and equipment, upgrade skills and handle new birds. It is also hoped that the Ringing Organiser would be able to attend this event. The first 'ringers' bash' is being organised at Bonamanzi near St Lucia by Gordon Holtshausen in October 1994 (see Announcement on page 84).

I see the potential for the annual ringers' bash to be the **primary source** of motivation and technical improvement for licensed ringers in the future. For these bashes to really succeed, it is vital that the event be as inclusive as possible, and should take place at widely spaced localities, so that all ringers have, at the very least, one fairly low-cost option in

which to participate every three or four years.

Finally, the input and feedback from the international visitors was very reassuring. One first-world visitor was envious of the administration of and approach to ringing in southern Africa. The affirmation of an international review is necessary to prevent parochiality.

All of this was achieved with a great deal of consensus and a minimum of passion, which belied the fact that the workshop will, I believe, have a lasting impact on ringing in southern Africa. Lastly, I would like to repeat the statement by Pertti Saurola, and later emphasized by Ian Rowley. Long-term life-history studies are very important and only the amateur has the time to pursue such studies. Without dedicated amateur involvement in ringing, the rate of gain in understanding of avian demography is severely curtailed.

REVIEWING THE TAXONOMY OF *PYCNONOTUS* BULBULS: A PROPOSED RINGING PROJECT

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On the 10th October 1992, I was ringing birds in my garden in Craighall Park. After catching and ringing 16 Blackeyed Bulbuls *Pycnonotus barbatus* within the space of about an hour, I checked the single mistnet again to find another two Blackeyed Bulbuls caught in the net as well as what appeared to be a single Redeyed Bulbul *Pycnonotus nigricans*!

Obviously I was very reluctant to ring the bird as a Redeyed Bulbul and immediately release it, knowing how suspicious my fellow ringers would be had I told them I caught a Redeyed Bulbul in my garden. I tried in vain to get hold of someone to confirm this sighting. Unfortunately, being Saturday, everyone had gone off to do their own ringing, while I was holding a bulbul in my hand with a definite orange wattle around its eye.

Even I was not convinced, however. I carefully took various measurements of the bird, checking through *Roberts'* in order to find some other anatomical confirmation to distinguish it from its